



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
HISTORICAL PRESERVATION & HERITAGE COMMISSION

Old State House 150 Benefit Street Providence, RI 02903

Telephone 401-222-2678
TTY 401-222-3700

Fax 401-222-2968
www.preservation.ri.gov

PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 4, 2006

Contact: Sarah Zurier, RIHPHC, 401-222-4142, szurier@preservation.ri.gov

**EVERYBODY CALLS THE NORTH END HOME:
WESTERLY HISTORIC DISTRICT LISTED ON NATIONAL REGISTER**

A historic neighborhood in Westerly has received federal recognition for its contributions to the history of architecture, community planning, ethnic heritage, and industry. Frederick C. Williamson, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), announced that the National Park Service has added the North End Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is the Federal Government's official list of properties throughout the United States whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation. The development of the North End Historic District between the 1830s and 1950s tells the story of local textile and granite industries and the waves of foreign immigration that came to Westerly. Italian immigrants and Italo-Americans built much of the North End and gave it a strong cultural identity that persists to this day.

The 150-acre North End Historic District contains 243 buildings and five other significant structures and sites just north of Westerly's downtown and east of the Pawcatuck River. The district's street pattern, largely established by 1870, follows an irregular grid around Pierce and Pleasant streets. Among the 50 non-residential buildings are one church, one mill, one school, two social clubs, and 43 commercial or mixed-use buildings, almost all of which date from the early- to mid-20th century, when large numbers of Italian immigrants settled in the North End. The design of

the majority of the district's buildings can best be described as vernacular: recognizably of its period, but not representing a specific architectural style.

Although Westerly was first settled in the mid-17th century, no major development took place in the area of the North End Historic District for almost two centuries. The mill village of Stillmanville, created for workers in Orsemus M. Stillman's nearby woolen mills by 1850, is the historic residential core of today's North End. The discovery of granite in the area in the 1830s and 1840s made the North End a convenient residential neighborhood for quarrymen and their families. Local industries and businesses received a major boost from the arrival of the Stonington & Providence Railroad, which was built through Westerly Village between 1832 and 1837.

Thriving textile and granite industries, railroad access, and business development downtown sparked a dramatic increase in the town's population. By the close of the 19th century, Stillmanville had attained most of its present street layout and had become a sizeable neighborhood. About half of the district's building stock (120 houses and the Pleasant Street Baptist Church) was built at this time for African-Americans and Irish, English, and Scots immigrants. Mill workers tended to live in the western half of the district, close to their workplaces on Canal Street, in houses that stand close together and close to the street, with relatively little ornamentation. In contrast, the eastern half of the District with its easy access to downtown, the train station, and several granite quarries, was predominantly occupied by residents of the artisan and middle classes: stoneworkers, professionals, office workers, store clerks, and railroad employees.

Between 1900 and 1955, the building stock nearly doubled, with 107 new structures (80 houses, 17 commercial buildings, 8 mixed use buildings, one school and one mill). The building boom resulted from an influx of Italian immigrants who called their new neighborhood "the North End." The immigrants and their descendants moved to the North End to be close to work at the textile mills and granite quarries and to be among relatives and acquaintances from their hometowns in Italy. Many residents were skilled stoneworkers, and evidence of their craft is seen in the ashlar,

fieldstone, and cobblestone walls that mark the front property lines of homes on Dayton, Pearl, Pierce, Pleasant, and Pond streets. Enduring Italian institutions include the North End Social Club, the Calabrese Club, and Liguori's Market on Pierce Street—in business for 80 years.

In 2001 the Town of Westerly began working with the North End Crime Watch/Community Development Inc. to improve the North End's physical and social environment. A 2003 revitalization plan recommended a number of strategies relative to housing, economic development, streetscapes, public amenities, and enhancing neighborhood identity and civic pride. One of those strategies was historic preservation. Now that the North End Historic District has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, historic tax credits and other incentives will be available to aid in rehabilitation and revitalization of this important historic neighborhood.

The National Register nomination for the North End Historic District was prepared by preservation consultant Kathryn Cavanaugh. According to Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the RIHPHC, "The significance of the North End Historic District is a reflection of the work and lives of Italo-Americans and other residents who contributed their energy to Westerly's development as a town. Rehabilitation of historic houses and other buildings in the North End honors this heritage while meeting today's needs."

In addition to honoring a property for its contribution to local, state, or national history, listing on the National Register provides additional benefits. It results in special consideration during the planning of Federal or federally assisted projects and makes properties eligible for Federal and Rhode Island tax benefits for historic rehabilitation projects. Owners of private property listed on the National Register are free to maintain, manage, or dispose of their property as they choose. As the state office for historic preservation, the Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission is responsible for reviewing and submitting Rhode Island nominations to the National Register.

-end-